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I was born with arthrogryposis multiplex congenita, a condition in which muscles and joints (primarily in the arms and legs) do not develop properly before birth. As a result, I am unable to raise my arms or bear any weight with my legs. As a subsequent result, I am **one of thousands** of people in the State of Michigan who cannot dress, undress, bathe, groom, get in or out of bed, clean their home or cook without complete assistance. That is to say that my very straightforward need for significant supports and services is far from uncommon in Michigan, the State in which you were elected by the people to represent the people.

I have been fortunate in being born into a family of caring, independent minded people, in a State that has been relatively forward-thinking (at least in my adult years) in terms of the needs of its citizens with disabilities. And I have been fortunate to have a great network of friends, colleagues and resources to call on throughout my life that have helped me to navigate the complex, hit-and-miss system of support that does exist to a far too limited degree. That is to say that whatever positive things can be said for the great State of Michigan's resources for people with disabilities, it cannot be said that they are consistent from county to county, plentiful enough to fulfill the existing need, free from bias and disparity from one group to the next, or easily found by the average person who needs them.

Considering myself a little more knowledgeable about and in touch with the resources that do exist than the hard-working family from whence I come, I have taken on the somewhat considerable task of improving the long-term care resources that do exist and doing my best to increase them so that when the elders of my family need them they'll have more agreeable options to choose from. Luckily, they're a bunch of tough old birds, because the cause has turned out to be anything but a long, long, long, tedious process.

My earliest strategic assessment of the situation was that our greatest foe is the federal institutional bias. Under current Medicaid regulations States are only obligated to offer a qualifying individual a bed in a nursing home. It is up to those in power in each State to determine their level of "goodwill" and apply for a comparable number of Waiver slots for that year. This assessment still stands, the Medicaid bias in favor of facility-based care is the greatest enemy of those who would prefer to have a real choice about where they live and receive the supports they need. But after years of advocating all over the country, I can tell you that a very close second, at least specific to the citizens you represent and for whom I look out for, is the lack of an intelligent system to help the them navigate the incredibly fractured system that we do have.

Now, this last barrier... advocates who know, who care, who live in the system we're talking about, we had actually succeeded in this fight for a temporary time with the Long Term Care Connection demonstration project. What the four pilot sites were demonstrating was that hundreds of people would call every single day with questions of great importance...even before any **real** concerted marketing had even begun! Without information, they were told what to do by the people that were eliminating their resources, by the people who had something to gain, or they were pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and proudly going without. With the assistance of Long Term Care Connection staff providing support by phone or in person they were able to find alternative resources within their communities, make informed decisions and stay in their own homes.

If you think it was not a helpful resource, look at the call logs. Look at the Service Point record details for each case if you think these were frivolous calls. If you think it was not a professionally run service, look at the 80% positive results of the ongoing consumer satisfaction results. If you doubt that it was being run efficiently, ponder how it exceeded its planned duration within its original financial means!

I have not touched on how much money every informed decision saved the State, hopefully someone else will. But **real choice** man, come on! Why would you mess with that?!